

The Education, Training, Employment, and General Care of the Blind

By
HENRY STAINSBY, Secretary-General
National Institute for the Blind
224-6-8 Great Portland Street
London, W.1

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THE EDUCATION, TRAINING EMPLOYMENT, AND GENERAL CARE OF THE BLIND

This monograph has been prepared with the object of assisting those interested in the welfare of the blind, particularly in connection with the application of the Blind Persons Act, 1920

(1) Blind Babies

The care of blind babies is of the utmost importance. It may safely be said that few, *very few*, parents of blind children know how to treat them. Such children are abnormal and cannot be trained quite on the lines of children in possession of their sight. Either they are spoiled by mistaken kindness or are greatly neglected; in either case the result is thoroughly bad. It is significant that blind children acquire objectionable habits far more readily than sighted children. These habits must be eradicated from earliest days by firm, judicious and yet kind treatment. The education of these children must by reason of their heavy handicap, be of a special nature. Further, sight saving should be resorted to if there is any prospect of securing even a modicum of vision. These form good reasons for placing blind children in suitable Training Homes as early after birth as practicable. Under the training which such Homes afford, the children, if mentally normal, improve with striking rapidity. Cleanliness, judicious feeding, suitable medical and surgical treatment and the watchful care of a trained and experienced staff produce the best results. Infant teaching is on the most approved lines, ear and hand training receiving special attention. Here also medical treatment is more easily available than when the children are scattered. Where it is impracticable to send a blind baby to a Home its mother should be instructed how to train it, and for this purpose a pamphlet "Blind Children and how to train them" published by the National Institute for the Blind, Great Portland Street, London, W.1 (Price 2d. post free) is recommended.

Blind Children who are found to be mentally defective—and the *percentage of these is unfortunately large—should not mix with mentally sound children as they do not themselves improve by such contact. On the other hand they have a baneful effect on the mentally sound children. Mentally defective blind children should be placed in special Institutions where they will receive maximum benefits.

Blind defectives of all ages should be *protected* and *controlled* for the whole of their lives, thus preventing the propagation of their own defects.

(2) Primary Education

At the age of five, blind children should be transferred from Blind Babies Homes to Schools for the Blind certified by the Board of Education under the Elementary Education (Blind and Deaf Children) Act, 1893. This Act makes it incumbent upon "School Authorities" to enable blind children between the ages of 5 and 16 resident within their areas, to obtain suitable education. A list of certified schools can be obtained from the Board of Education. (List 42). This Act is not affected by the Blind Persons Act, 1920.

(3) Higher Education and Technical Training

Powers in respect of the continuation of the education of the blind over the age of 16 are conferred on Education Authorities under the Education Act, 1902, Part II, and the Education Act, 1918.

It is obvious that the education of the blind should not cease at the age of 16, because education in their case must include a training in some handicraft or profession whereby they may be enabled to become self-supporting, and it is strongly urged that steps be taken to secure this training in full measure.

Many of the primary schools have continuation departments while other schools are conducted solely for the training of the blind over the age of 16.

* Of the children under 5 years of age dealt with by the National Institute for the Blind 50% are now found to be mentally defective. This percentage has risen from 33½%.

As a large percentage of blind persons lose their sight in adult life, professional and handicraft training is necessary even up to the age of 50, after which it is rarely successful.

Where practicable, adult blind persons should continue in the occupations which they followed before losing their sight, their re-education consisting of fitting them for their new condition in life.

Where this course is not feasible and a handicraft is necessary, arrangements should be made for admission into a Workshop for the Blind where suitable trades are taught.

In some instances where, for good reason, a blind person cannot attend a Training Centre, it may be necessary to provide a home instructor.

The following is a list of trades practised by the blind, some being suitable for the workshop, some for the home and some for either :—

- Brush making.
- Basket making.
- Mat making.
- Mattress making and allied industries.
- Cane and rush seating.
- Boot repairing and clog making.
- Carpentry and wooden toy making.
- Ships' fender making.
- Netting and string bag making.
- Hand and machine knitting.
- Weaving.
- Poultry farming.
- Egg collecting.
- Dairy work.
- Pig rearing.
- Gardening, nursery work, fruit farming.
- Domestic work.
- News vending.
- Shop keeping.

While it is a fact that the majority of the blind are engaged in manual work, a considerable percentage follows what may be termed intellectual pursuits such as :-

- Holy Orders.
- Law.
- Politics.
- Music.
- Lecturing.
- Teaching, Coaching, etc.
- Journalism.
- Business Management.
- Commercial Travelling.
- Organizing and Secretarial.
- Shorthand and Typewriting.
- Insurance and other Agencies.
- Telephony.
- Massage.
- Pianoforte tuning.

Some of these, *e.g.*, Shorthand and Typewriting, Telephony, Massage, Pianoforte tuning, are taught in schools for the Blind, but others may be acquired by attendance at ordinary Technical Schools, Colleges, Universities, etc., along with sighted people, special books and apparatus being provided for their use.

(4) Employment

It is generally agreed that the best method of employing the blind is in special and well-equipped workshops in which trades suited to their limitations can be practised. Those most generally followed on a large scale are the manufacture of baskets, brushes, mats, bedding, and machine knitted and hand woven articles.

It is a truism to say that the more extensive the workshop and larger the departments forming the workshop, the more likely will be its success from every point of view.

A workshop for the blind should be conducted on the most approved business principles and its Trading Account prepared as though it were an ordinary profit making concern.

Any assistance rendered to the blind on account of their blindness such as relief, augmentation of wages and tutorial oversight should not be made a charge upon trading but should be debited to an appropriate General Account. By such means only can the management of the workshop be fairly judged.

Intimately connected with employment, but not necessarily forming a part of it, is the question of the augmentation of wages. It is generally admitted that blindness handicaps the manual worker to such a degree that he cannot earn more than half the amount which a sighted worker in the same trade can earn. It therefore follows that if he is to be placed on anything like an equal footing with his more fortunate fellow workman a substantial weekly allowance must be made to him from some source other than that of trading. In every well-organised workshop the wages of the blind workers are augmented.

Apart from employment in workshops, a considerable number of manual workers, either from force of circumstances or from choice, practise their craft at home. The earnings of the majority of these are very small, while the supervision of the workers is difficult and costly. Home workers require constant visitation and oversight; the standard of their work must be maintained; materials must be supplied to them at lowest prices and (frequently) their goods must be marketed.

Every encouragement should be given to the employment of what may be termed the professional class. It is obvious that blindness inflicts a lesser handicap upon the brain-worker than upon the manual worker; hence the advocacy of intellectual pursuits. If well-qualified and efficiently equipped the professional worker will as a rule require less continuous assistance than the manual worker. It is, however, essential that at the commencement of his career he should have every possible advantage. A post should be secured for him and he should be equipped with suitable apparatus, *e.g.*, the blind correspondence clerk should be provided with a shorthand machine and a typewriting

machine ; a pianoforte tuner with a full outfit of tools ; the teacher of music with a pianoforte and quantity of embossed music.

(5) Home Visitation

The work of Home Visitation (or Home Teaching as it is generally called) consists in searching out the scattered blind and assisting them in a variety of ways. Home Visitation should be a feeder of most branches of work for the blind. The young are introduced to the responsible Education Authorities and the adults taught to read and to practise various home occupations by which some may develop into home workers. A few of the adult section are placed under training and employed in workshops. Home visitors should as a rule be blind, but there should also be a judicious proportion of sighted visitors.

(6) Pensions

In addition to the State "Old Age" Pension for which blind persons over the age of 50 are eligible, there are a large number of other pensions granted by Blind Pension Societies. A list of these, with other useful information, is contained in a pamphlet entitled "Information with regard to Institutions, Societies and Classes for the Blind in the United Kingdom," by Henry J. Wilson, Gardner's Trust for the Blind, 53 Victoria Street, Westminster, London, S.W., Price 3d. Post free, 4d.

(7) Voluntary Agencies

Most of the services rendered to the blind have hitherto been through Societies supported by voluntary contributions. These services are very varied and include education, training in trades and professions, employment, home teaching, after-care, pensions, &c. Lists of these Societies can be obtained from the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education. They are also contained in the pamphlet referred to above.

(8) Government Grants

Grants are payable to approved and registered societies through the Ministry of Health in respect of :—

- (1) Workshops for the Blind.
- (2) Provision of assistance to Home-workers.
- (3) Homes and Hostels for the Blind.
- (4) Home-Teaching.
- (5) Book-Production.
- (6) Counties Associations.
- (7) Miscellaneous.

Full particulars are contained in a pamphlet entitled "Welfare of the Blind" (Circular, Regulations and Rules, 7th August, 1919.), Ministry of Health. Obtainable from His Majesty's Stationery Office or any Bookseller. Price 3d.

Grants are also obtainable from the Board of Education under paragraphs 2 and 3 of this pamphlet.

SIR ARTHUR PEARSON'S book "Victory over Blindness," which relates primarily to St. Dunstan's, has been modified so as to be of service to blind civilians and those interested in their welfare. It is in course of publication by the National Institute for the Blind, under the title "The Conquest of Blindness," and will shortly be on sale, price 2/6 nett; postage 4d.



